

INVICTA ANALYTICS

Inclusion of Caravans in Dwelling Stock

Official figures for annual change in the dwelling stock for England are based on local authority returns.

However, every 10 years, official dwelling stock figures are revised, to reflect the count obtained from the England Population Census.

The 2021 Census saw some significant changes in the official dwelling stock figures for many local authorities. In official figures, the revision then resulted in annual delivery of new net dwellings being adjusted for the previous 10 years, to bring change in dwelling stock from one census to the next into line.

ONS consider the dwelling stock figures from the Census to be the most definitive and reliable source for dwelling stock counts.

As an example of the scale of adjustments resulting from the 2021 Census, for Swale in Kent, ONS decided that housing delivery for the previous 10 years needed adjusting upwards by an additional 282 net new dwellings a year above the counts provided by the local authority.

If the 2021 census count of dwellings is assumed to be reliable, then in practice it would probably be safer to assume that the 2011 census was unreliable and the extra 282 dwellings a year for Swale would be better treated as a revision to the 2011 count. All available evidence suggests local authorities in Kent provide highly reliable counts of net new dwellings each year.

However further digging on this issue and after making some enquiries with MHCLG and ONS, suggests the dwelling stock figures for 2021 are for some local authorities incorrect and require correction. ONS has not accepted the error at this stage but has provided information to confirm this is the case.

The main issue seems to be that for the 2021 Census ONS have significantly increased the count of caravans, mobile homes and temporary structures included in the dwelling count. Official definitions from MHCLG on a definition of a dwelling clearly states that caravans, mobile homes and temporary structures are only counted as dwellings when subject to council tax and used as permanent residences.

The main upshoot of all this, is that if proposed changes to the NPPF are taken forward, future housing targets will be based on a percentage increase in dwelling stock. Local authorities will accordingly want to be confident that official dwelling stock figures are as reliable as possible, and that caravans and other mobile structures not subject to council tax are not included in dwelling stock figures.

The 2011 and 2021 Census counts of caravans and other mobile structures included in dwelling stock figures for Kent and Medway are shown in the table below, along with the size of the change and the number that were unoccupied on Census Day 2021.

It will be down to individual local authorities to ascertain whether they agree that these counts of caravans are correct and are indeed subject to council tax and therefore part of dwelling stock.

While the figures for some Kent local authorities are notable, the overall impact on resulting housing targets may not be that significant. However, there are some local authorities in the country where their housing stock has been revised upwards by close to 30% for the inclusion of caravans not previously counted, and which are clearly also not subject to council tax.

This issue may therefore be raised in wider national conversations.

Table 1 - Caravan or other mobile or temporary structure
As included in dwelling stock figures counted at Census dates

	2011	2021	Increase	Unoccupied 2021
Ashford	499	860	361	145
Canterbury	673	865	192	165
Dartford	118	160	42	20
Dover	976	780	-196	440
Gravesham	129	180	51	40
Maidstone	641	1,015	374	185
Medway	855	909	54	180
Sevenoaks	567	700	133	115
Folkestone and Hythe	279	1,335	1,056	1,100
Swale	493	3,190	2,697	2,605
Thanet	925	1,115	190	645
Tonbridge and Malling	199	290	91	45
Tunbridge Wells	166	215	49	45
	6,520	11,614	5,094	5,730

Source: [Number of dwellings by housing characteristics in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

It can be seen from the above table that the significant dwelling stock adjustment for Swale from the 2021 Census is almost entirely accounted for by the inclusion of 2,697 more caravans than in 2011, the majority of which were unoccupied on Census Day.

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